



A STRANGE

SAD COMEDY

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**BY
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I

ONE sunny November day, in 1864, Colonel Archibald Corbin sat placidly reading "The Spectator" in the shabby old library at Corbin Hall, in Virginia. The Colonel had a fine, pale old face, clean shaven, except for a bristly, white mustache, and his white hair, which was rather long, was combed back in the fashion of the days when Bulwer's heroes set the style for hair-dressing. The Colonel—who was no more a colonel than he was a cheese-box—had an invincible placidity, which could not be disturbed by wars or rumors of wars. He had come into the world in a calm and judicial frame of mind, and meant to go through it and out of it calmly and judicially, in spite of rude shocks and upheavals.

Everything about Colonel Corbin had reached the stage of genteel shabbiness—a shabbiness which is the exclusive mark of gentlemen. His dignified frock-coat was white about the seams with much brushing, and the tall, old-fashioned "stock" which supported his chin was neatly but obviously mended. The furniture in the room was as archaic as the Colonel's coat and stock. A square of rag carpet covered the floor; there had been a Brussels carpet once, but that had long since gone to the hospital at Richmond—and the knob of the Colonel's gold-headed cane had gone into the collection-plate at church some months before. For, as the Colonel said, with a sort of grandiose modesty—"I can give but little, sir, in these disjointed times. But when I do give, I give like a gentleman, sir."

There had been a time, not long before that, when he had been compelled to "realize," as the Virginians euphemistically express it, upon something that could be converted into cash. This was when it became necessary to bring the body of his only son, who had been killed early in the war, back to Corbin Hall—and likewise to bring the dead man's twelve-year-old daughter from the far South, where her mother had quickly followed her father across the gulf. Even in that sad extremity, the Colonel had never dreamed of "realizing" on the great piles of silver plate, which would, in those times, have commanded instant sale. The Corbins, who were perfectly satisfied to have their dining-room furnished with some scanty horsehair sofas and a few rickety chairs and tables, had a fancy for loading down rude cupboards with enough plate for a great establishment, according to a provincial fashion in Virginia. But instead of this, the Colonel sacrificed a fine threshing-machine and some of his best stock without a qualm. The Colonel had borne all this, and much more,—and the rare, salt tears had worn little furrows in his cheeks,—but he was still calm, still composed, under all circumstances.

The sun had just marked twelve o'clock on the old sun-dial in the garden, when the Colonel, happening to glance up, saw Aunt Tulip, the dairymaid, streaking past the window, with her petticoat over her head, followed by Nancy, the scullion, by little Patsy Jane, who picked up chips for the kitchen fire, by Tom Battercake, whose mission in life was indicated by his name,—the bringing in of battercakes being an important part of life in Virginia,—and by Juba, who was just beginning his apprenticeship by carrying relays of the eternal battercakes from the kitchen to the dining-room. And the next moment, Miss Jemima, the Colonel's sister and double, actually danced into the room with her gray curls flying, and gasped, "Brother, the Yankees are coming!"

“Are they, my dear Jemima?” remarked the Colonel, rising. “Then we must prepare to meet them with all the dignity and composure possible.” As the Colonel opened the door, his own man, Dad Davy, nearly ran over him, blurting out the startling news, “Marse, de Yankees is comin’!” and the same information was screeched at him by every negro, big and little, on the plantation who had known it in time to make a bee-line for the house.

“Disperse to your usual occupations,” cried the Colonel, waving his hand majestically. The negroes dispersed, not to their business, but with the African’s natural love of a sensation to spread the alarm all over the place. By the time it got to the “quarters,”—the houses of the field-hands, farthest away from “de gret house,”—it was reported that Dad Davy had told Tom Battercake that he saw Aunt Tulip “runnin’ outen de gret house, and the Yankees wuz hol’ in er pistol at ole Marse’ hade, and Miss Jemima, she wuz havin’ er fit with nobody but little Patsy Jane,” etc., etc., etc. What really happened was, the Colonel walked calmly out in the hall, urging Miss Jemima to be composed.

“My dear Jemima, do not become agitated. David, you are an old fool. Thomas Battercake, proceed to your usual employment at this time of day, cleaning the knives, or whatever it is. Would you have these Yankee miscreants to think us a body of Bedlamites?”

Just then, down the stairs came running pretty little twelve-year-old Letty, his granddaughter. Letty seized his veined and nervous hand in her two pink palms, and expressed a willingness to die on the spot for him.

The Colonel marched solemnly out on the porch, and by that time, what seemed to him an army of blue-coats was dashing across the lawn. A lieutenant swung himself off his horse, and, coming up the steps, demanded the keys of the barn, in a brogue that could be cut with a knife.

“No, sir,” said the Colonel, firmly, his gray hair moved slightly by the autumn wind, “you may break open my barn-door, but I decline to surrender the keys.”

The lieutenant, at that, struck a match against the steps, and a little point of flame was seen among the withered tendrils of the Virginia creeper that clung to the wooden pillars of the porch.

“Now, will you give up those keys, you obstinate ould ribil?” asked the lieutenant, fiercely.

“No!” responded the Colonel, quite unmoved. “The term that you apply to me is the one that was borne with honor by the Father of his country. Moreover, from your accent, which I may be permitted to observe, sir, is grotesque to the last degree, I surmise that you yourself may be a rebel to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, for certainly there is nothing American about you.”

At this, a general snicker went around among the enemy, for discipline was not very well observed between officers and men in those days. Then, half a dozen cavalymen dropped off their horses and made for the well, whence they returned in a twinkling with water to put out the fire that had begun to crackle ominously. The Colonel had not turned a hair, although Miss Jemima behind him and Letty had clung together with a faint cry.

The lieutenant rode off in the direction of the barn, ordering most of the men to follow him. Wagons were then seen coming down the lane, and going toward the barn to cart off the Colonel’s corn and wheat. The sympathies of those who were left behind were plainly with the Colonel. Especially was this so with a tall, lanky, grizzled sergeant, who had been the first man to put out the fire.

“I am much obliged to you, my good man,” said Colonel Corbin, loftily, “for your efforts in extinguishing the flames started by that person, who appears to be in command.”

“You’re welcome,” answered the lanky sergeant, with the easy familiarity of the rural New-Englander.

The lieutenant had showed unmistakably the bullying resentment of a peasant brought face to face with a gentleman, but the lanky sergeant indirectly felt some subtle sympathy with a spirit as independent as his own.

“I am glad, brother,” said Miss Jemima, “that these men who are left to guard us are plainly Americans. They will be more humane than foreigners.”

“Vastly more so,” answered the Colonel, calmly watching the loading of his crops upon the wagons in the distance. “There is, particularly in New England, a sturdy yeomanry, such as our friend here belongs to,” indicating the sergeant, “which really represents an admirable type of man.”

“Gosh,” exclaimed the sergeant, in admiration, “it’s the durndest, gamest thing I ever see, you standin’ up here as cool as a cucumber, when your property’s bein’ took. I kin stand fire; my grandfather, he fought at Lexington, and he didn’t flunk nuther, and I ain’t flunked much. But I swan, if you Johnny Rebs was a-cartin’ off my hay and stuff, I’d be a deal more excited ’n you are. And my old woman—gosh t’ almighty!”

The lanky sergeant seemed completely staggered by the contemplation of the old woman’s probable behavior upon such an occasion.

“There are other things, my friend,” answered the Colonel, putting his hands under his coat-tails and turning his back upon the barn in the distance, “which are of more consequence, I opine, than hay and corn. That, I think, the most limited intelligence will admit.”

“That’s so,” responded the lanky sergeant, “I kin do a sight better keepin’ bees up in Vermont than down here in Virginny fightin’ the rebs for eighteen dollars a month, but when Uncle Abe called for seventy-five thousand men I couldn’t a-kep’ them bees another day, not if I had been makin’ two hundred dollars a month at it. When I heard ’bout it, I kem in, and I said to the old woman: ‘I’ve got a call,’ and she screeched out, ‘A call to git converted, Silas?’—the old woman’s powerful religious,—and I says, ‘No, Sary—a call to go and fight for the Flag.’ And when we talked it over, and remembered about my grandfather,—he lived to be selectman,—the old woman says, ‘Silas, you are a miser’bul man, and you’ll git killed in your sins, and no insurance on your life, and it’ll take all I kin rake and scrape to bring your body home, but mebbe it’s your duty to fight for your country.’ And she said I might come, and here I am, and the bees is goin’ to thunder.”

“Unfortunately for me, sir,” said the Colonel, with a faint smile, but with unabated politeness. “However, I wish to say that you are pursuing your humble but unpleasant duty in a most gentlemanlike manner. For, look you, the term gentleman is comprehensive. It includes not only a man who has had the advantages of birth and station,—advantages which I may, with all modesty, claim, as enjoying them without any merit of my own,—but a man like yourself, of honorable, though humble parentage, who possesses a sturdy independence of spirit to which, I may say, my friend with the violent brogue is a stranger.”

The lanky sergeant, who had a dry, Puritanical humor of his own, was immensely tickled at this, and, at the same time, profoundly respectful of a man who could enter into disquisitions respecting what constituted a gentleman while his goods were being confiscated under his very nose.

“I tell you what,” said he, becoming quite friendly and confidential with the Colonel, “there’s a fellow with our command,—an Englishman,—and he’s got the same name as yours—Corbin—only he’s got a handle to it. He is Sir Archibald Corbin, and I never see a young man so like an old one as he is like you. He just seems to me to be your very image. He ain’t reg’larly attached nor nothin’; he’s just one of them aide’campers. He might be your son. Hain’t you got any son?”

At this, little Miss Letty, who had kept in the background clinging to Miss Jemima, came forward, and the Colonel put one arm around her.

“I had a son,—a noble son,—but he laid down his life in defense of his State, and this is his orphan child,” said he.

The lanky sergeant took off his cap and made a bow.

“And I’ll be bound,” he said, with infinite respect in his awkwardly familiar manner, “that your son was true grit.” He stopped and hunted about in his mind for a title to bestow upon the Colonel superior to the one he had, and finally hit upon “Judge,” to which title the Colonel was as much entitled as the one he bore.

“Judge, I don’t believe you’d turn a hair if there was a hundred pieces of artillery trained on you. I believe you’d just go on talkin’ in this ’ere highflown way, without kerin’ about anything except your dignity. And if your son was like you, he didn’t have no skeer in him at all, General.” By this time the sergeant had concluded that the old gentleman deserved promotion even from the title of Judge.

The Colonel inclined his head, a slight flush creeping into his wan face.

“You do me honor,” he said, “but you do my son only justice.”

By this time the wagons had been loaded up and were being driven off. The scared negroes that had flocked about the house from all over the plantation were peering, with ashy faces, around the corners and over the garden fence. The men were ordered to fall in, the lieutenant giving his orders at a considerable distance, and in his involuntary and marked brogue. The lanky sergeant and the few men with him mounted, and then all of them, simultaneously, took off their caps.

“Three cheers for the old game-cock!” cried the lanky sergeant enthusiastically. The cheers were given with a will and with a grin. The Colonel bowed profoundly, smiling all the time.

“This is truly grotesque,” he said. “You have just appropriated all of my last year’s crops, and now you are assuring me of your personal respect. For the last, I thank you,” and so, with cheering and laughter, they rode off, leaving the Colonel with his self-respect unimpaired, but minus several hundred bushels of corn and wheat. The negroes gradually quieted down, and the Colonel and Miss Jemima and little Miss Letty retired to the library. The Colonel took down his family tree, and began gravely to study that perennially entertaining document in order to place the Corbin who was serving as aide-de-camp in the Union army. Miss Jemima, too, was deeply interested, and remarked sagely:

“He is no doubt a great-grandson of Admiral Sir Archibald Corbin, who adhered to the royal cause and was afterward made a baronet by George III.”

At that very moment, the Colonel hit upon him.

“That is he, my dear Jemima. General Sir George Corbin, grandson of the admiral and son of Sir Archibald Corbin, second, married to the Honorable Evelyn Guilford-Hope, has one son and heir, Archibald, born May 18, 1842. His father must be dead, and he has but little more than reached his majority. Sister, if he were not in the Federal army, I should be most happy to greet him as a kinsman. But I own to an adamantine prejudice toward strangers who dare to meddle in civil broils.”

So had Miss Jemima, of course, who regarded the Colonel’s prejudices as direct inspirations from on high.

The very next week after the visitation of the Federal cavalry came a descent upon the part of a squad of Confederate troopers. As the Colonel and Miss Jemima entertained the commanding officers in the library, with the most elaborate courtesy and home-made wine, the shrill quacking and squawking of the ducks and chickens was painfully audible as the hungry troopers chased and captured them. The Colonel and Miss Jemima, though, were perfectly deaf to the clamor made by the poultry as their necks were wrung, and when a cavalryman rode past the window with one of Miss Jemima’s pet bronze turkeys hanging from his saddle-bow and gobbling wildly, Miss Jemima only gave a faint sigh, and looked very hard at little Miss Letty, who was about to shriek a protest against such cruelty. Even next morning she made not a single inquiry as to the startling deficit in the poultry yard. And when Aunt Tulip began to grumble something about “dem po’ white trash dat cum ter a gent’mun’ house, an’ cornfuscate he tu’keys settin’ on the nes’,” Miss Jemima shut her up promptly.

“Not a word, not a word, Tulip. Confederate officers are welcome to anything at Corbin Hall.”

A few nights after that, the Colonel sat in the library looking at the hickory fire that danced up the chimney and shone on the polished floor, and turned little Letty’s yellow hair into burnished gold. Suddenly a terrific knocking resounded at the door.

In those strange times people’s hearts sometimes stood still when there was a clamor for entrance; but the Colonel’s brave old heart went on beating placidly. Not so Dad Davy’s, who, with a negro’s propensity to get up an excitement about everything, exclaimed solemnly:

“D’yar dee come to bu’n de house over we all’s hades. I done dream lars night ’bout a ole h’yar cotch hade fo’mos’ in er trap, an’ dat’s a sho’ sign o’ trouble and distrust’fulness.”

“David,” remarked the Colonel, according to custom, “you are a fool. Go and open the hall door.”

Dad Davy hobbled toward the door and opened it. It was about dusk on an autumn night, and there was a weird half-light upon the weedy lawn, and the clumps of gnarled acacias, and the overgrown carriage drive of pounded oyster-shells. Nor was there any light in the large, low-pitched hall, with its hard mahogany sofa, and the walls ornamented with riding-whips and old spurs. A tall and stalwart figure stood before the door, and a voice out of the darkness asked:

“Is this the house of Mr. Archibald Corbin, and is he at home?”

The sound of that voice seemed to paralyze Dad Davy.

“Lord A’mighty,” he gasped, “’tis Marse Archy’s voice. Look a heah, is you—is you a *ha ’nt*?”¹¹

“A what?”

But without waiting for an answer Dad Davy scurried off for a moment and returned with a tallow candle in a tall silver candlestick. As he appeared, shading the candle with one dusky hand, and rolling two great eyeballs at the newcomer, he was handed a visiting card. This further mystified him, as he had never seen such an implement in his life before; he gazed with a fixed and frightened gaze at the young man before him, and his skin gradually turned the ashy hue that terror produces in a negro.

“Hi, hi,” he spluttered, “you is de spit and image o’ my young Marse, that was kilt long o’ dis lars’ year. And you got he voice. I kin mos’ swar you wuz Marse Archy Corbin, like he wuz fo’ he got married.”

“And my name is Archibald Corbin, too,” said the young man, comprehending the strange resemblance between himself and the dead and gone Archy that had so startled the old negro. He poked his card vigorously into Dad Davy’s hand.

“What I gwine to do with this heah?” asked Dad Davy, eying the card suspiciously.

“Take this card to your master.”

“And if he ax me who k’yard ’tis, what I gwi’ tell him?”

At this the young man burst out into a ringing, full-chested laugh. The negroes were new to him, and ever amusing, and he could not but laugh at Dad Davy’s simplicity. That laugh brought the Colonel out into the hall. He advanced with a low bow, which the stranger returned, and took the card out of Dad Davy’s hand, meanwhile settling his spectacles carefully on his nose, and reading deliberately:

“Sir Archibald Corbin, Fox Court.”

The Colonel fixed his eyes upon his guest, and, like Dad Davy, the resemblance to the other Archibald Corbin overcame him instantly. His lips trembled slightly, and it was a moment or two before he could say, with his usual blandness:

“I see you are Archibald Corbin, and I am your kinsman, also Archibald Corbin.”

“Being in your neighborhood,” said Sir Archibald, courteously, “I could not forbear doing myself the pleasure of making myself known to the only relatives I have on this side of the water.”

There was something winning and graceful about him, and the Colonel was much surprised to find that any man born and bred outside of the State of Virginia should have so fine an address.

“It gives me much gratification,” replied Colonel Corbin, in his most imposing barytone, “to acknowledge the relationship existing between the Corbins of Corbin Hall in Virginia and those of Fox Court in England.”

In saying this he led the way toward the library, where two more tallow dips in silver candlesticks had been lighted.

When young Corbin came within the circle of the fire's red light—for the tallow dips did not count—Miss Jemima uttered a faint scream. This strange sensation that his appearance made in every member of the family rather vexed the young Englishman, who was a robust specimen, and with nothing uncanny about him, except the strange and uncomfortable likeness to a dead man whom he had never seen or heard of until that moment.

“Pardon me,” said the Colonel, after a moment, in a choked voice, “but your resemblance to my only son, who was killed while gallantly leading his regiment, is something extraordinary, and you will perhaps understand a father's agitation”—here two scanty tears rolled down upon his white mustache. Even little Miss Letty looked at the newcomer with troubled eyes and quivering lips.

Young Corbin, with a hearty and healthy desire to get upon more comfortable subjects of discourse, mentioned that, having a taste for adventure, he had come to America during the terrible upheaval, and through the influence of friends in power he had obtained a temporary staff appointment, by which he was able to see something of actual warfare.

This statement was heard in absolute silence. Young Corbin received a subtle impression that his new-found relatives rather disapproved of him, and that the fact that he was a baronet with a big rent-roll, which had hitherto brought him the highest consideration, ranked as nothing with these primitive people. Naturally, this was a stab to the self-love of a young fellow of twenty-two, but with the innate independence of a man born to position and possessions, he refrained from forcing his consequence upon his relatives. The Colonel talked learnedly and eloquently upon the subject of the Corbins and their pedigree, to which Miss Jemima listened complacently. Little Miss Letty, though, seemed to regard the guest as a base intruder, and glowered viciously upon him, while she knitted a large woolen sock.

Supper was presently announced by Dad Davy. There might be a rag carpet on the floor at Corbin Hall, and tallow dips, but there was sure to be enough on the table to feed a regiment. This supper was the most satisfactory thing that young Sir Archy had seen yet among his Virginia relations. There was an “old ham” cured in the smoke from hickory ashes, and deviled turkey after Miss Jemima's own recipe, and it took Tom Battercake, Black Juba, and little Patsy Jane, all together, to bring in supplies of battercakes, to which the invariable formula was: “Take two, and butter them while they are hot.”

The Colonel kept up a steady fusillade, reinforced by Miss Jemima, of all the family history, peculiarities, and what not, of the Corbin family. The Corbins were, to a man, the best judges of wines in the State of Virginia; they inherited great capacity for whist; and were remarkable for putting a just estimate upon people, and inflexible in maintaining their opinions. “Of which,” said the Colonel, suavely, “I will give you an example:

“My honored father always believed that it was the guest's duty, when spending the night at a house, to make the motion toward retiring for the night. My uncle, John Whiting Corbin, held the contrary. As both knew the other's inflexibility they avoided ever spending the night at each other's houses, although upon the most affectionate and brotherly terms. Upon one occasion, however, my uncle was caught at Corbin Hall by stress of weather. The evening passed

pleasantly, but toward midnight the rest of the family, including my sister Jemima and myself, retired, leaving my father and his brother amicably discussing the Virginia resolutions of '98. As the night wore on both wished to retire, but my father would not transgress the code of etiquette he professed, by suggesting bedtime to his guest, nor would my uncle yield the point by making the first move.

“When, at daylight the next morning, my boy Davy came in to make the fire, here, sir, in this library, I assure you, my father and his brother were still discussing the resolutions of '98. They had been at it all night.”

This was one of the Colonel's crack stories, and Sir Archy laughed at it heartily enough. But with all this studied hospitality toward himself, he felt more, every moment, in spite of the Colonel's sounding periods, that he was merely tolerated at best, and as he had never been snubbed before in his life, the experience did not please him. At ten o'clock he rose to go, saying that he preferred traveling by night under the circumstances. The Colonel invited him to remain longer, with careful politeness, but when the invitation was declined, no more was visible than civil regret. Nevertheless, the Colonel went himself to see that Sir Archy's horse had been properly fed and rubbed down, and Miss Jemima went to fetch a glass of the home-made wine, which nearly choked Sir Archy in the effort to gulp it down. He was alone for a few moments with pretty little Letty, who had not for a moment abandoned her standoffish attitude.

“Will you be glad to see me the next time I come, little cousin?” he asked, mischievously.

Here was a chance for Letty to annihilate this brazen newcomer, and she proceeded to do it by quoting one of the Colonel's most elaborate phrases. She got slightly mixed on the word “adamantine,” but still Letty thought it sounded very well when she remarked, loftily, “I have an anti-mundane prejudice toward foreigners meddling in domestic broils.” And every word was punctuated by a scowl.

Miss Letty fondly imagined that the young Englishman would be awed and delighted at this prodigious remark in one so young, but when Sir Archy burst into one of his rich and ringing laughs, Letty promptly realized that he was laughing at her, and could have pulled his hair with pleasure.

Sir Archy was still laughing and Letty was still blushing and scowling when their elders returned. In a little while Sir Archy was galloping down the sandy lane at Corbin Hall, with the faint lights of the grim old house twinkling far behind him. It was an odd experience, and not altogether pleasing. For once, he had met people who knew he was a baronet, and who did not care for it, and who knew he had a great property, and who did not feel the slightest respect for it. There was something sad, something ludicrous, and something noble and disinterested about those refined, unsophisticated people at Corbin Hall; and when that little sulky, frowning thing grew up, she would be a beauty, Sir Archy decided, as he galloped along the sandy road through the moonlight night.

II

TEN summers after this, the old Colonel and Miss Jemima and Miss Letty scraped up money enough to spend a summer in a cheap boarding-house at Newport. Many surprises awaited the Colonel upon his first visit to Newport since “before the war, sir.” In the first place, the money they paid for their plain rooms seemed a very imposing sum to them, and they were extremely surprised to find how small it was regarded at Newport.

“Newport, my dear Jemima and Letty, is a more expensive place than the White Sulphur in its palmyest days, when it had a monopoly of the chivalry of the South,” announced the Colonel, oracularly.

Letty had innocently expected a great triumph, especially with her wardrobe. She had no less than five white Swiss muslin frocks, all tucked and beruffled within an inch of her life, and she had also a lace parasol, besides one that had belonged to her mother, and several lace flounces and a set of pearls. This outfit, thought Letty, vain and proud, was bound to make a sensation. But it did not. However, no matter what Letty wore, she was in no danger of being put behind the door. First, because she was so very, very pretty, and second, because she was so obviously a thoroughbred, from the sole of her little arched foot, up to the crown of her delicate, proud head. And Letty was so extremely haughty. But she soon found out that Swiss muslin frocks don't count at Newport, and that even a Corbin of Corbin Hall, who lodged in a cheap place, was not an object of flattering attention.

And the more neglected she was, the more toploftical she became. So did the Colonel, and so did Miss Jemima. Walking down Bellevue avenue with the Colonel, Letty would criticize severely the stately carriages, the high-stepping horses and the superbly dressed women and natty men that are characteristic of that swell drive. But when a carriage would pass with a crest on its doors, the Colonel's white teeth showed beneath his mustache in a grim smile.

“One of the Popes,” he remarked, with suave sarcasm, “who started in life as a cobbler, took for his papal arms a set of cobblers' tools. But I perceive no indication whatever, in this community of retired tradespeople, that they have not all inherited their wealth since the days of the Saxon Heptarchy.”

For a time it seemed as if not one single person at Newport had ever heard of Colonel Archibald Corbin, of Corbin Hall. But one afternoon, as Letty and her grandfather were taking a dignified promenade,—they could not afford to drive at Newport,—they noticed a stylish dog-cart approaching, with a hale, manly fellow, neither particularly young nor especially handsome, handling the ribbons. Just as he caught sight of the Colonel he pulled up, and in another moment he had thrown the reins to the statuesque person who sat on the back seat, and was advancing toward the old man, hat in hand.

“This must be Colonel Corbin. I can't be mistaken,” he cried, in a cordial, rich voice.

Letty took in at a glance how well set up he was, how fresh and wholesome and manly.

“It *is* Colonel Corbin,” replied the Colonel, with stately affability.

“But you don’t remember me, I see. Perhaps you recall my father, John Farebrother—wines and liquors. We’re not in the business now,” he said, smiling, turning to Letty with a sort of natural gracefulness, “but, contrary to custom, we haven’t forgotten it.”

The Colonel seized Farebrother’s hand and sawed it up and down vigorously.

“Certainly, certainly,” he said. “Your father supplied the cellars of Corbin Hall for forty years, and the acquaintanceship begun in a business way was continued with very great pleasure on my part, and I frequently enjoyed a noble hospitality at your father’s villa here, in the good old days before the war.”

“And I hope you will extend the same friendship to my father’s son,” said Farebrother, still holding his hat in his hand, and looking very hard at Letty, as if to say, “Present me.”

“My granddaughter, Miss Corbin,” explained the Colonel, and Letty put her slim little hand, country fashion, when she was introduced, into the strong, sunburned one that Farebrother held out to her. Farebrother nodded to the statuesque person in the dog-cart, and his nod seemed to convey a whole code of meaning. The dog-cart trundled off down the road, and Farebrother walked along by Letty’s side, the Colonel on the other. Letty examined this new acquaintance critically, under her dark lashes, anxiously endeavoring to belittle him in her own mind. But having excellent natural sense, in about two minutes and a half she recognized that this man, who mentioned so promptly that his father dealt in wines and liquors, was a gentleman of the very first water. In fact, there is no discounting a gentleman.

Almost every carriage that passed caused Farebrother to raise his hat, and Letty took in, with feminine astuteness, that he was a man of large and fashionable acquaintance. He walked the whole way back to their dingy lodgings with them, and then went in and sat in the musty drawing-room for half an hour. What had Miss Corbin seen at Newport? he asked. Miss Corbin had seen nothing, as she acknowledged with a faint resentment in her voice. This Mr. Farebrother pronounced a shame, a scandal, and a disgrace. She must immediately see everything. His sisters would call immediately; he would see to that. His mother never went out. He hoped to see Miss Corbin at a breakfast or something or other his sisters were planning. They had got hold of an Englishman with a handle to his name, and although the girls pretended that the Britisher was only an incident at the breakfast, that was all a subterfuge. But Miss Corbin should judge for herself, and then, after thanking the Colonel warmly for his invitation to call again, Farebrother took his leave.

The very next afternoon, an immaculate victoria drove up to the Corbins’ door, and two immaculately stylish girls got out. Miss Jemima and the Colonel were not at home, so Letty received the visitors alone in the grim lodging-house parlor. They got on famously, much of the sweetness and true breeding of the brother being evident in the sisters. They were very English in their voices and pronunciation and use of phrases, but in some way it did not sound affected, and they were genuinely kind and girlishly cordial. And it was plain that “our brother” was regarded with extreme veneration. Would Miss Corbin come to a breakfast they were giving next Saturday? Miss Corbin accepted so delightedly, that the Farebrother girls, who were not accustomed to Southern enthusiasm over trifles, were a little startled.

Scarcely had the young ladies driven off when up came Mr. Farebrother. Letty, at this, their second meeting, received him as if he had been a long-lost brother. He, however, who knew

something about the genus to which Letty belonged, grinned with keen appreciation of her rapturous greeting, and was not the least overpowered by it. He hung on in the most unfashionable manner until the Colonel arrived, who was highly pleased to meet his young friend, as he called Farebrother, who had a distinct bald spot on the top of his head, and the ruddy flush of six-and-thirty in his face. Farebrother desired the Colonel's permission to put him up at the Club, and offered him various other civilities, all of which the Colonel received with an inconceivably funny air of conferring a favor instead of accepting one.

Newport assumed an altogether different air to the Corbins after the Farebrother raid. But Letty's anticipations of the breakfast were dashed with a little secret anxiety of which she was heartily ashamed. What should she wear? She had never been to a fashionable breakfast before in her life. She hesitated between her one elaborate gown, and one of her fresh muslins, but with intuitive taste she reflected that a white frock was always safe, and so concluded to wear one, in which she looked like a tall white lily.

The day of the breakfast arrived; the noon-day sun shone with a tempered radiance upon the velvety turf, the great clumps of blue and pink hydrangeas, and the flower borders of rich and varied color, on the shaven lawns. It was a delicious August forenoon, and the warm and scented air had a clear and charming freshness. The shaded piazzas of the Farebrother cottage, with masses of greenery banked about them, made a beautiful background for the dainty girls and well-groomed men who alighted from the perfect equipages that rolled up every minute. Presently a "hack" in the last stage of decrepitude passed through the open and ivy-grown gateway, and as it drew up upon the graveled circle, Letty Corbin, in her white dress and a large white hat, rose from the seat. Farebrother was at her side in an instant, helping her to descend. Usually, Letty's face was of a clear and creamy paleness, but now it was flushed with a wild-rose blush. It had suddenly dawned upon her that the ramshackly rig, which was quite as good as anything she was accustomed to in Virginia, did not look very well amid the smart carriages that came before and after her. However, it in no wise destroyed her self-possession, as it would have done that of some of the girls who descended from the smart carriages. And there was Farebrother with his kind voice and smile, waiting to meet her at the steps, and pouring barefaced compliments in her ear, which last Miss Letty relished highly.

The two girls received her cordially, and introduced her to one or two persons. But they could not devote their whole time to her, and in a little while Letty drifted into the cool, shaded, luxurious drawing-room, and found that she was left very much to herself. The men and girls around her chatted glibly among themselves, but they seemed oblivious of the fact that there was a stranger present, to whom attention would have been grateful. Two very elegant looking girls talked directly across her, and were presently joined by a man who quite ignored her even by a glance, and although she sat between him and the girls, he kept his eyes fixed on them. Letty thought it was very bad manners.

"At Corbin Hall," she thought bitterly, "a stranger would have been overwhelmed with kind attentions"; but apparently at Newport a stranger had no rights that a cottager was bound to respect.

"The fact is, Miss Cornwell," said the man, in the studied, low voice of the "smart set," "I've been nearly run off my legs this week by Sir Archy Corbin. He's the greatest fellow for doing things I ever saw in my life. And he positively gives a man no rest at all. We've always been good friends, but I shall have to 'cut him' if this thing keeps up."

The lie in this statement was not in the least obvious to Letty, but was perfectly so to the young women, who knew there was not the remotest chance of Sir Archy Corbin being cut by any of their set. The name, though, at once struck Letty, and her mobile face showed that she was interested in the subject.

“Will he be at the meet on Thursday, Mr. Woodruff?” asked the girl, suddenly dropping her waving fan and indolent manner, and showing great animation. At this, Woodruff answered with a slightly embarrassed smile:

“Well—er—no, I hardly think so. You know, in England, this isn’t the hunting season—”

“Oh, no,” struck in Miss Cornwell, perfectly at home in English customs, “their hunting season is just in time to break up the New York season.”

Letty’s face, which was very expressive, had unconsciously assumed a look of shocked surprise. Hunting a fox in August! For Letty knew nothing of the pursuit of the fierce and cunning aniseseed bag. Her lips almost framed the words, “How dreadful!”

Woodruff, without glancing at her, but taking in swiftly the speaking look of disgusted astonishment, framed with his lips something that sounded like “Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.”

A blush poured hotly into Letty’s face. The rudeness of talking about her before her face angered her intensely, but did not for a moment disconcert her. There was a little pause. Miss Cornwell looked straight before her with an air of amused apprehension. Then Letty spoke in a clear, soft voice:

“You are mistaken,” she said, looking Woodruff calmly in the face. “I do not belong to that society. I do not altogether believe in professional philanthropy. I was, it is true, shocked at the idea of fox-hunting in August, because, although I have been accustomed to seeing hunting in a sportsmanlike manner all my life, the fox was given a chance for his life.”

It was now Woodruff’s turn to blush, which he did furiously. He was not really a rude man, but his whole social training had been in the line of trying to imitate people of another type than himself, and consequently his perceptions were not acute. The imitative process is a blunting one. But he did not desire to give anybody pain, and the idea of a social blunder was simply harrowing to him.

“Pray excuse me,” he said, and looked a picture of awkward misery, and Miss Cornwell actually seemed to enjoy his predicament.

Letty had instantly risen as soon as she had spoken, but by the time she had taken a step forward there was a little movement in front of her, and the next moment she saw the same Sir Archibald Corbin she had seen ten years ago, standing in front of her, holding out his hand and saying: “May I ask if this is not my cousin, Miss Corbin, of Corbin Hall? You were a little girl when I saw you last, but I cannot be mistaken.”

“Yes, I am Letty Corbin,” answered Letty, giving him her hand, impulsively; she would have welcomed her deadliest enemy at that moment, in order to create a diversion.

But the effect of this meeting and greeting upon Woodruff and Miss Cornwell, and the people surrounding them, was magnetic. If Letty had announced, “I am the sole and only representative

of the noble house of Plantagenet," or Howard, or Montmorenci, their surprise could not have been greater.

Sir Archy spoke to them with that cool British civility which is not altogether pleasing. Woodruff had time to feel a ridiculous chagrin at the footing which his alleged friend put him on, and Letty was quite feline enough to let him see it. She fixed two pretty, malicious eyes on him, and smiled wickedly when instead of making up to Sir Archy, he very prudently turned toward Miss Cornwell, who likewise seemed secretly amused.

But Sir Archy's manner toward Letty was cordiality itself. He asked after the Colonel.

"And such a royal snubbing as I got from him that time so long ago," he said, fervently. "I hope he has no intention of repeating it."

"I can't say," replied Letty, slyly, and examining her cousin with much approval. He had the delicious, fresh, manly beauty of the Briton, and he had quite lost that uncanny likeness to a dead man which had been so remarkable ten years ago. He had, however, the British simplicity which takes all of an American girl's subtleties in perfect candor and good faith. He and Letty got along wonderfully together. In fact, Letty's fluency and affability was such that she could have got on with an ogre. But presently Farebrother came up and carried her off, under Sir Archy's very nose, toward the dining-room. As Letty walked across the beautiful hall into the dining-room beyond, some new sense of luxury seemed to awaken in her. She was familiar enough with certain elegancies of life,—at that very moment she had her great-grandmother's string of pearls around her milky-white throat,—and Corbin Hall contained a store of heirlooms for which the average Newport cottager would have bartered all his modern bric-à-brac. But this nicety of detail in comfort was perfectly new and delightful to her, and she confided so much to Farebrother.

"You see," she complained, confidentially, "down in Virginia we spend all we have on the luxuries of life, and then we have to do without the necessaries."

"I see," answered Farebrother, "but then you've been acknowledged as a cousin by an English baronet. Think of that, and it will sustain you, and make you patient under your trials more than all the consolation of religion."

"I'll try to," answered Letty, demurely.

"And he is a first-rate fellow, too," continued Farebrother, who could be magnanimous. "I made up to him at the club before I knew who he was—"

"Oh, nonsense. You knew he was a baronet."

"I'll swear I didn't. Presently, though, it leaked out that he was what the newspapers call a titled person. We were talking about some red wine that a villain of a steward was trying to palm off on us, and Sir Archy gave his opinion, which was simply rubbish. I told him so in parliamentary language, and when he wanted to argue the point, I gently reminded him that my father and my grandfather had been in the wine-importing line, and I had been born and bred to the wine business."

By this time Farebrother's light-blue expressive eyes were dancing, and Letty fully took in the joke.

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